

Women as Proponents of Antifeminism

A Dialectical-Relational Approach to Antifeminism in the United States

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ABSTRACT

This thesis employs Fairclough's method of dialectical-relational critical discourse analysis to examine how women are at the forefront of antifeminist discourse within the American far right. In examining popular right wing women's discourse one can reveal their characterization of feminism and the underlying sentiments used to substantiate their claims, including religion masculinism and nationalism. This method of critical discourse analysis is concerned with examining social wrongs and how they are supported and sustained. Elements of intertextuality and interdiscursivity are employed to examine these discourses. Discourse is powerful as it is a tool of reality building and can shape social practice and the interplay between different social groups. The prevalence of antifeminist discourse has societal implications as they sustain patriarchal systems of oppression. Furthermore, intersections of identity can compound the effects of discrimination in a patriarchal society, thus an intersectional feminist approach is used to address the complexities of lived experience.

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Introduction

The goal of this thesis is to uncover the way in which far right ideology, specifically antifeminism, is reinforced through language and discourse. In doing so one can determine what principles and beliefs a group or a society as a whole values or dismisses; what voices are uplifted and which are silenced. The far right sphere in the United States uses discourse to ‘other’ certain groups and maintain that their beliefs are based in an inherent nature or common sense, frequently through the guise of nationalism, religion, and patriarchal tradition. Through discourse, women within the right are the leading proponents of antifeminism. Though this may seem counterintuitive that a group would advocate against their own interests, I posit that women leading the antifeminist current are nationalists, Christians, or wives before they are women. In this way women use their status to spread far right ideologies regarding feminism and gender rights to uphold the larger movement to which they belong. The modern feminist movement’s goals are generally to end violence against women (including physical, psychological, and sexual violence), achieve workplace equality (including equal opportunity for promotion and financial compensation) (Higgins, 2012), and ensure women’s autonomy over their own lives and bodies. Established women within right wing politics have postulated that feminism is no longer needed, men and women are already equal in American society, there is nothing left to work for and essentially, all contemporary demands of the feminist movement are rooted in selfishness and misandry. Establishing a dominant discourse is paramount when trying to influence society and social

formations. Far right populism in the United States has been successful in normalizing certain discourses in an attempt to maintain social hierarchy and the status quo.

Political discourse is as obvious as speeches, editorials, and interviews by office holders, and as simple and broad as a street conversation or a passing comment. Societies are not only concrete systems in which people interact with the material and the social, they are also thought and spoken. “Ideology does not exist outside of discourse” (Seidel, 1988, p.8). These are the symbolic interpretations of societal relations and what gives them value, and what values belong to which social groups (Seidell, 1988). The dominant discourse of a society is pervasive, gaining justification and power from the institutions that uphold them. Oftentimes the discourse of the majority comes to head with the discourse of the minority. Where the identities and theoretical beliefs of the majority group are seen as neutral and objective, the discourse of the minority group is seen as subjective, politically charged, emotional, and hysterical (Seidell, 1988). Seidel (1988) posits that the discourse of the right presents facts, claims, and truths that must be maintained and improved upon in accordance with the right’s own logic, conformities, and nature. In this way the far right is known to posit domination, exploitation, and inequality as socially necessary and complimentary, as it is a natural fact (Seidell, *ibid*).

Through critical discourse analysis this thesis works to understand how antifeminist discourse works within the far right to justify inequality and discrimination. This approach to language “is concerned with the critique of relations of power and ideology in society at large” (O’Regan & Betzel, 2015, p.2). More specifically the dialectical-relational approach to critical discourse

analysis, developed by Norman Fairclough, assumes that groups and individuals use language to realize social purposes. Fairclough said, “power is partly discourse, and discourse is partly power- they are different but not discrete” (2010, p.4). Women in the far right are leading efforts to shift their supporters view of feminism and the necessity for societal and political changes. This analysis takes into account discourse from popular women within the far right’s sphere including excerpts from speeches, interviews and personal social media.

Prevalence of antifeminist discourse is exemplary that there are lasting societal inequalities in the United States. Antifeminism is intensified by racism, anti-LGBTQ+, poverty and other motivations for discrimination. Intersectional identities face compounding effects of antifeminism. For this reason white, Christian, heterosexual, upper class, women may not be subjected to the full extent of dominant patriarchal society in the same way marginalized women do. This analysis is based in intersectional feminist thought with the belief that transgender women’s rights are women’s rights. Additionally, this thesis works with the recognition that white women’s voices have been the overpowering representation of the feminist movement, in many ways appropriating resources and chances to be represented and heard.

CHAPTER 1: Situating Concepts

Situating concepts are principal for constructing understanding and relevance. Themes such as far right populism, feminism, and antifeminism must first be defined and historically located to form the basis of research into prevalent antifeminist discourse.

1.1 Far Right Populism

Populism is defined by distrust in mainstream media and political establishments, and emphasizes “a virtuous populace... as the sole legitimate source of political power” (Schroeder, 61). Populists are exclusionary by nature, which calls into question the legitimacy of the democracy once they are in power. Populism works to exclude those of the out-group or those not belonging to ‘the people’, from full citizenship. In right wing populism there is a differentiation between the ‘true people’ and the other. Both internal (domestic) and external (supranational) enemies threaten ‘the people’. Far right populist discourse often pits the true people against the supposed corrupt elites while drawing on common conceptions and stereotypes of ‘the other’ (Wodak, 2019). The exclusion of the ‘other’ from socio-political spheres is intended to “create a sense of community and belonging within the allegedly homogenous ‘people’”(Wodak, 2019, p.21). Far right populist parties and movements gain a following by utilizing political imaginaries, nationalist tradition, and identity narratives. The United States does this with the endorsement of the traditional Christian-conservative agenda. It is easy to conflate far right populism with other movements such as the radical right, alt-right, and even fascism, so how does one define far right populism? Firstly, Wodak (2019) states the aforementioned ‘people’ (not only as a sovereign people but also an ethnos), versus the ‘other’, and the ‘people’ versus the elites (those with cultural, economic, and

social power) are emphasized. Second, in a Rousseauian sense, the will of the people is sacred (Wodak, 2019).

Additionally, Wodak (2019) posits the crucialness of four themes in relation to defining far right populism: nationalism, anti-elitism, authoritarianism, and conservatism. In regards to nationalism, there is a high value attributed to the homeland and protecting that homeland from ‘aliens’ and ‘invaders’. The imagined threat further solidifies the opposition of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ and invokes an antagonistic quality. According to Wodak (2019) far right populist parties often share an anti-elite and anti-intellectual stance. As a result, there has been widespread skepticism surrounding academia and academic institutions as those on the right see them as being overrun with liberal values and attempting to sway the next generations to the left. Additionally, the authoritarian leader is necessary in the success of far right populists as they act as a kind of savior for the ‘people’. The leader walks the line between being the voice of the downtrodden and the unwavering boss. They emphasize law and order and security, often substantiated with a militarized police force. Finally, far right populist movements are representations of tradition; traditional gender roles, family values, Christianity. To preserve these standards, they are conflated with preserving the nation as a whole. The downfall of conservative values is equated with the downfall of society (Wodak, 2019, p.26). These elements are all typical in regards to far right populists movements.

Politicians and pundits of far right parties build an image as the true voice of the ‘people’, as a result the discourse of the far right populists becomes its own genre. “They strategically create their own visions, beliefs, threat scenarios and nationalistic/nativist identities” through the

combination of “scandal, provocation, transgression, and passion” (Wodak, 2019, p.27). The best way to spread this discourse is through media like radio, television debates, news outlets, campaign rallies, slogans, and websites such as Facebook, Twitter, 4chan, Reddit, etc. Globalized media are utilized to construct narratives. This has proven to be effective, maybe partially because of the algorithmic nature of current social media where it creates essentially a feedback loop.

What you believe becomes the only perspective you see with an algorithmic style of search engines and the “exclusionary mechanisms” in which information is presented (Rogers, 2013, p.96). Search engines are able to “boost” certain sources, giving privilege to some based on what they think you want to see. This is beneficial in pushing master narratives.

Misinformation, polarization, mistrust of traditional politics and appeal to far right values made major impacts on American populations, increasing validity and activity of countermovements in recent years (Pérez-Curiel et al, 2021). The right draws from neo-liberal theory including belief in the free market, emphasis on individual freedom, loosening of state control and intervention, social hierarchy, authority, and national security (Seidell, 1988). Through recent events such as the 2020 US presidential election and the January 2021 attack of the Capitol Building one can see the impact of far right populism in the United States.

1.1.1 The Right in Historical Context

Framing populism historically will actualize the far right characteristics of the nation itself (Wodak, 2019). Far right populism left the margins of the political mainstream but this cannot be

largely or wholly attributed to Trumpism or similar European developments as the foundations were laid in post World War II South America (Wodak, 2019, p.22). Figures like Peron and Chavez used their charisma to construct an identity, for the people but of the state, thus conflating the two entirely (Wodak, 2019). Several populist parties have risen in the United States since the 1890s but the election of Donald Trump marked a new stage of far right politics (Wodak, 2019, p.23). One can place Donald Trump at the forefront of modern right wing populist movements. His campaign and presidency worked to undermine the legitimacy of the media and overall democracy in the United States. Trump's ascension was largely achieved from social media dominance where he casted his controversial takes on an array of issues and as a result many journalists and media outlets were eager to cover (Schroeder, 64). Operating outside of political institutions, Trump appealed to a large group of Americans (Wodak, 2019). Trump relied on mainstream media to amplify his social media hot takes and then sowed seeds of mistrust, suggesting he is the only valid source of information. This can be attributed to the mediatization of politics and how the media portrays scandalous, negative, and sensational positions- coverage that only benefits far right populists (Wodak, 2019, p.31). His far right stances on issues such as immigration and his challenges of political correctness gave him substantial support from those that consider themselves left out by the media and elites. Trump was able to promise "easy solutions to complex problems" and thus win over millions disillusioned by past government failures (Wodak, 2019, p.23). Doused in nationalism and avidity toward American tradition, supporters of Trump took harshly "anti-immigrant, anti-refugee, and anti-Muslim stances" (Schroeder, 65). The fear mongering of political parties is thus a persuasive strategy. The other is always responsible for the misery of the 'people' whether it be Muslims, Jews, China, Russia,

career women, socialists, and so on (Wodak, 2019). Resistance to feminist movements and LGBTQ+ movements can be directly linked to populists like Trump appealing to straight white men's fears of societal change and loss of power (Kushnarenko, 2019). An identity rooted in masculinism crutches on patriarchal hierarchy. According to Kushnarenko (2019), the appeal of Donald Trump was the promise of "making America great again", bringing back the past and men's systemic power and status. Trump's followers deemed themselves the legitimate 'people' while working to exclude the other. In this way we can see far right populism create in and out groups. Following this, the charismatic leader (in this case Donald Trump), appears to save the country from collapse at the hands of the other. Donald Trump was crucial in taking far right ideologies from the fringes of political society and giving them verity in the mainstream. The women later discussed as a part of the discourse analysis of antifeminism have all been affiliated with Donald Trump; either working under his administration, publicly endorsing and defending him and his policies, and one even speculated to be his running mate in the 2024 presidential elections (Wu, 2022).

1.1.2 Identity Politics

Political and social othering is used by the far right as a tool to maintain social hierarchies and justification of subjugation. Far right parties' use of scapegoating the 'other' leads to rising acceptance of intolerant ideologies in the majority community (Berman, 2021). Influx of immigration, positive social perception of LGBTQ+, feminism, and social justice movements heighten fears that traditional values are being threatened. Specifically, white-christian-male values are threatened. This is exemplified by the ideology of white Christian nationalism fervently

represented in symbols, motifs, and expressions at the recent insurrection of the Capitol (Cummings, 2022). When the ethnic and gender hierarchies are challenged, radical right movements gain support in hopes to stick to the status quo. As the majority group is ‘threatened’ in the United States more power comes to parties pushing their commitment to protecting “their groups’ status and identity” (Berman, 2021, p. 75). In the aftermath of rising far right populism we see a great polarization within the United States.

In this way political and social othering links to the concept of identity politics. In relation to the concept of identity politics, it is important to understand which groups buy into these group based identity threats and which groups are scapegoated and othered on the political and national stage. This question can aid in portraying what racial and socio-economic dynamics are at play in addition to gender dynamics. The supposed threat to the majority group: white, middle class, Christians (*US population by...*, 2022; Nadeem, 2022; Kochhar & Sechopoulosby, 2022) is constructed by far right populists by othering, scapegoating, or misconstruing issues related to minority groups including feminists, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and people of color. Identity politics form a sort of ‘groupness’ where classifications (especially visible classifications) of the population work to consolidate identity (Bliss, 2013). Group identity can be highly politicized which is notable for people of color, women, and the LGBTQ+ community or people belonging to several of these identifiers at once. In the framework of group based identities, individuals perceive and experience the world through the identities they belong to. For example, Bliss (2013) mentions that a person of color experiences the world racially as race has informed their memories and previous experiences, or a woman under a patriarchal society experiences the

weight of male domination. Furthermore, these identities are distinguished by the fact that “socially dominant groups have denied them” the control over their own experience (Sampson 1993, p.1219). American politicians and commentators use identity as hot debate, especially following the re-election of Barack Obama and certainly during the campaign and election of Donald Trump, radicalizing and weaponizing identities. The “social intersections” of group identities are then embodied by figures as a guise to “ensure representation in domains of power” (Rodriguez, 2019, p.103). For example, during the 2016 elections, many voted for Hillary Clinton [for] her identity as a woman. Rodriguez (2019) posits that identity politics in its original sense has been co-opted by neoliberalism, thus there should be a distinction between identity politics and neoliberal identity politics of which the latter example conforms. Even as group identities are constructed, they are shifting through historical contexts and political movements (Sampson, 1993). In consideration of far right movements it can be seen that group identities are subject to response by anti-groups. In the same way far right counter-revolutions are formed in response to calls for social progress, counter-groups form in response to politicized group identities. For example, gay pride movements are contested by ‘straight pride’ groups and feminist rights movements are opposed by antifeminist and men’s rights movements. These counter-groups can also be called countermovements or reactionary political movements. They are usually created to uphold the societal status quo; for example white supremacy, patriarchal tradition, and gender normatives.

1.2 (Intersectional) Feminism

In the simplest of definitions, feminism is the belief that men and women are equal beings. Feminist movements work to end disparities between men and women, sexism, discrimination, and exploitation (Santacruz & Ruth, 2017). Through the feminist movement, participants aim to disrupt patriarchal tradition and systemic oppression. Though these efforts are necessary, feminist theory has frequently been situated from a white and Christian perspective (Seidel, 1988). Women of privilege are then able to make their concerns the main concerns of the movement as they are the most highlighted group in media and the public (Hooks, 2000). As a result, women of color, trans women, non-binary people, and non-Christian women have been left out of the movement in many cases (Santacruz & Ruth, 2017). There are hierarchies in power that are based not only on gender and sexuality constructs but also, for example, on racial and ethnic constructs, class stratifications, religious differences, and able-bodiedness; “categories of oppression” (Santacruz & Ruth, 2017, p.114). As a result of these systemic biases, a person holding one or more of these identifiers are knocked down the social ladder and may face more discrimination and exploitation. Intersectional feminism acknowledges the role that white women play in “perpetuating systems of oppression” as white voices have often dominated in the movement, and in mainstream society (Santacruz & Ruth, 2017, p.111). Exclusion of intersectional identities leads to further marginalization and the relaying “of access to resources and power for groups commonly retaining privilege and power” (Santacruz & Ruth, 2017, p.110-4). The experience of identity is multidimensional, and so must be our social movements. Intersectional thought takes into account an individual's overlapping experiences and identities when considering the complexity of the

prejudice they may face. Every person has unique backgrounds that can contribute to the way they take up space or experience a society, these experiences may be positive or negative depending on what a society values. Bell Hooks offers her definition of feminism as follows; “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (2000, p.1). Hooks (2000) acknowledges that whether the perpetrators and perpetrators be male, female, adult, or child, the root of the issue is sexist thinking and action. Spaces without male presence are not inherently feminist as women can uphold patriarchal and sexist beliefs (Hooks, 2000). Confronting underlying sexist thinking from an individual standpoint regardless of gender is the first step in creating a unified feminist cause that can address the effects of male domination and the multiplex of class and race issues (Hooks, 2000).

1.3 Antifeminism

Antifeminism relates to the countermovements and ideologies in opposition to feminism and the socio-political manifestation of sexism and misogyny (Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2021). Antifeminism can present itself in different ways. For example, Masculinism holds the claim that societies keystone is a masculine way of life and that feminism threatens to dismantle that (Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2021). Additionally, nationalist and religious antifeminist movements are more popular in the wake of growing far right populist movements and abortion rights activism. To be a proponent of antifeminism it is not necessary to be active members of antifeminist groups; “words and gestures in the private sphere correspond to the public discourses of the antifeminist movement” that follow and intertwine different streams of religious tradition, masculinist groups, and even neo-Nazis (Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2021, p.281). Blais and Dupuis-Déri (2021) posit that another

large proponent of antifeminist rhetoric is mainstream media as well as social media, as they are able to spew prejudices about women and feminists to large audiences. Traits of antifeminism include limiting women's choice, the upholding of traditional gender norms, and the protection of male supremacy and patriarchal society. It is commonplace that antifeminist movements paint feminism as “anti-male, anti-heterosexual, and anti-family” and criticize higher learning institutions as being liberal indoctrination for offering classes on feminist studies (Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2021, p.283).

1.3.1 A Short Historical Context of Antifeminism in the United States

Appearing simultaneously to the surge in feminist movements in the late nineteenth century, antifeminism was well integrated into civil and political society on the basis and justification of its defense of tradition (Bard, n.d.). Bard (n.d.) posits that antifeminist ideology is rooted in nature and divine will. The progression of feminism meant a threat to the social order, patriarchy, and male domination. Antifeminist rhetoric was prevalent in cultural works throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, including books and plays that presented femininity as weakness while also targeting homosexuality as it is seen to be lacking masculinity. Antifeminist advocacy was not only backed by men but also women as tens-of-thousands of women joined anti-suffrage movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Bard, n.d.). Into the mid twentieth century antifeminism was strong as traditional gender roles were not to be questioned. By the late twentieth century antifeminist vigor was met with growing backlash. As a result, movements upholding masculinism and the rights of men aimed to defend against a woman dominated the world. Throughout the nineteen-seventies and eighties the United States saw rise in antifeminism

and additionally, anti-abortion movements. Bard (n.d.) states that women played a leading role in this new era of conservatism not only including working against equal rights for women but also against members of the LGBTQ+ community and racial integration efforts. In the decades to follow women became crucial to conservative parties in the United States, criticizing feminism and calling for a shift back to traditional conceptions of men and women and their roles in society. “Anti-women laws are less a product of male politicians, and more a function of patriarchal politics” (Hemmer, n.d.). Furthermore, antifeminists worked to stop the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, an amendment that would have codified equal rights for women into the United States Constitution. Additionally, Hemmer (n.d.) states conservative thinkers hold a large number of school board seats across the United States, making it easier to enact policies in agreement with their political views at a local level. Additionally, abortion laws in many states have regressed or been repealed altogether, actively harming women’s healthcare. Hundreds of new abortion restrictions have been instated at the state level since 2010. At the forefront of these initiatives have been women. Hemmer (n.d.) states, that “both feminism and anti-feminism are not a function of gender but of politics. And...while that might seem self-evident, it was neither clear in the 1970s, when few men publicly identified as feminist, nor in the current era, when people too readily identify the ‘war against women’ as one in which all the antagonists are men”.

CHAPTER 2: Methodology

2.1 Applied Methods and Motivations

“We continually and actively build and rebuild our worlds not just through language, but through language used in tandem with actions, interactions... and distinctive ways of thinking, valuing, feeling, and believing” (Gee, 1999, p.11). Humans build identities and can recognize identities that are being built around us. Gee (1999) emphasizes “situated identities”, or social positions that we “enact and recognize in different settings” and “social languages” that allow us to engage in different ways (Gee, 1999, p.12). Context makes up for things left unsaid. Gee (2011) defines context as the physical setting in which communication takes place and encompasses gestures, shared knowledge, things previously said, and cultural understanding. Through discourse analysis one hopes to convey not only attached meaning but also what feelings and responses words can invoke. Individuals with large audiences and platforms have a higher world building power as their words reach many. McCombs and Shaw (1972) state this can relate to the theory of agenda setting, a theory in which the media (and contemporarily people of influence) are able to dictate which topics are of great significance to the public. In other words, mass media and people of influence can shape public perception of a topic; whether that be in favor of the topic, the topic as a threat, or the topic as something abhorrent (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). An example of this may include the rise in race and ethnic based hate crimes in the United States directly following the election of Donald Trump whose campaign was notable for exclusionary and hateful rhetoric (Barrouquere, 2017). Gee (2011, p.8) states that human communication “is not always benign”, it can be harmful, inhumane, unfair, and unequal. Social and political issues, such as the feminist/

antifeminist dichotomy, are not limited to conversations between individuals but rather they are discourses for which individuals act as “carriers” (Gee, 1999, p.18). Through word and action, discourse is carried through history and consequently forms history as discourse constitutes the social through the production and reproduction of power relations. Discourse becomes the medium through which ideology holds power (Schirato et al, 2012).

A main theorist to the critical discourse analysis methodology is Michel Foucault. He viewed social problems as institutionalized and recognized that discourse reproduces exclusionary social practices. He suggests a challenge of unjust discourse to seek social change. The rules of discursivity relate to power. Discourse is created by, and reproduces the social system; whether it be through selectivity, exclusion, or domination. In a Foucauldian analysis there is a question of truth, one’s sense of truth, or the ‘will to truth’, in which the way knowledge is formed and distributed are seen skeptically (Hook, 2001). Strong and dominant discourses attempt to hold onto claims that they are ‘natural’, “on the level of the various correlates of the ‘true’ and reasonable” (Hook, 2001, p.6). In a methodological analysis it is pertinent to skeptically view discourses that legitimize themselves as being a part of an unquestionable truth. Discourse is not only words but an event. This approach to discourse is not only a study of language or textuality, but discourse “as an active ‘occurring’” (Hook, *ibid*). In a Foucauldian sense discourse carries out power and action, and inherently is power and action. Discourse is “the violence which we do things” (Foucault, 1981, p.67). It is a tool that maintains itself while also creating its own continuity (Hook, 2001).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) works to study language via theoretical streams rather than purely textual analysis. CDA is “a critical perspective or attitude in the field of discourse studies, using many different methods of the humanities and social sciences” (Van Dijk, 2016, p.63).

Through Fairclough’s interpretation of CDA, the researcher seeks ‘semiotic points of entry’ into the discourse whether it be written or spoken. Semiotic relates to semiosis, or the meaning-making aspects of discourse. This in relation to other social structures is what the approach is most concerned with. This approach is the dialectical-relational approach, focused on identifying and discussing linguistic features of discourse and how they relate to interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2010). Normalized ideologies that posit themselves as ‘reasonable’ or ‘common sense’ may go unscrutinized and unquestioned by mainstream society. Fairclough’s approach is informed by critical realism because CDA addresses non-discursive structures, in addition to discursive structures, as to not reduce the social to discourse alone (Bhaskar, 2008; Chouliarako & Fairclough, 1999). Additionally, this approach aligns with Bhaskar’s critical realist understanding of reality, that there is a differentiation between the ‘real’ world and the ‘observable’ world. In short, “unobservable structures cause observable events” (Education Studies, n.d.). In a critical realist frame, “discourse construes reality” as reality is distinct from society’s knowledge of it (O’Regan & Betzel, 2015, p.3). In this way, discourse in relation with other social elements (such as the political, religion, and education) have causal power. Discourses enacted through mass media often involve hidden relations of power (Fairclough, 1989). There is a ‘one-sidedness’ as the audience is separated in place and time from the creator, therefore giving the creator the power of reality construction as feedback from co-participants is eliminated. Contrastingly language such as speeches are designed for the target group, confirming and constructing realities the audience

may be in accordance with (Fairclough, 1989). The dialectical-relational approach works to understand where the social wrong comes from and how it operates (Fairclough, 2010). Broadly put, social wrongs are parts of society that do harm; racism, homophobia, antifeminism (social wrongs can thus be subjective). The dialectical-relational approach is concerned with righting social wrongs through four stages:

1. Focusing upon a social wrong, in its semiotic aspects.
2. Recognizing obstacles to addressing the social wrong.
3. Appraising whether the social order 'needs' the social wrong.
4. Identifying possible ways past the obstacles.

Critical discourse analysis is employed for this thesis to understand the establishment of antifeminist discourse in mainstream political ideology. Examining established individuals in political society can aid in discerning origins and proliferation of harmful social practice.

Intertextual analysis as well as interdiscursive analysis are utilized to draw conclusions upon larger theoretical implications and debates.

2.2 Sampling

The content to be analyzed was picked along several dimensions. Firstly, the sample must have been uttered or written by a woman. In addition, the women associated with the sample should all have known ties or allegiance to far right populist parties. Samples for analysis were collected from speeches, television program appearances, social media accounts (including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram), podcasts, interviews, congressional documents, self written online

articles, and news articles. The entire range of discourse dates from 2013 to 2022, with the outright majority being created after 2015. For eligibility the samples must have included concepts related to antifeminism as it relates to socio-political spheres in the United States. For an intersectional feminist approach, sampling of discourses broadly followed concepts related to antifeminism (including masculinist antifeminism, nationalist antifeminism, and religious antifeminism) as well as gender issues, the LGBTQ+ community, and identity politics as the intersections of these concepts can compound the effects of systemic discrimination in a patriarchal society. Women included in this research include Candace Owens, Marjorie Taylor Greene, Lauren Boebert, and Kayleigh McEnany; a mix of political commentators and elected representatives. The above-named were included in far right discourse if (1) their known ideologies aligned with those of the far right; (2) their supporters include known far right extremist organizations/individuals. These women range in age from 30-48 years. This range was chosen as they directly precede the group of women who are most likely to identify with feminism (18-29 years old), yet they are the second least likely group to identify (Barroso, 2021).

2.3 Limitations

With reverence for intersectional analysis there arises a limitation in including anti-black, anti-brown, and anti-immigrant discourses from the aforementioned women as their discourse does not overtly mention women of these minority groups, but instead the groups as a whole. This is similar for ableist discourse. However, many discourses sampled can lead back to discussions on the interconnections of racism and feminism and will be mentioned when appropriate. Not for lack

of trying, this thesis can not fully cover the metaphysical aspects of the chosen methodology. The dialectical-relational approach is greatly influenced by critical realism (Roy Bhaskar), as was aforementioned, but in hopes to not misconstrue the concept and its intricacies this thesis will not delve into the philosophy's nuances but instead focus on the material societal implications. It is my intention to engage with nuanced theoretical concepts for a well rounded analysis of antifeminist discourse and its societal implications while simultaneously promoting social justice. Even so, these promotions may not be accompanied by pragmatic, phased strategies for progress but instead suggest broader resolutions.

2.4 Positionality & Ethical Dilemmas

My positionality was important when situating the field of study. As a woman I have experienced casual antifeminism, misogyny, and sexism in my day-to-day life. Additionally, my hometown and state is deeply entrenched in patriarchal and racist tradition that is reflected in the majority support for far right leaders and commentators who help perpetuate antifeminist rhetoric and ideology. For this reason I maintain a deep connection with issues pertaining to antifeminism. This relationality is limited in the fact that as an able bodied, straight, white woman I can never truly understand the systemic disparities people of intersectional identities face in that society. Privileges can prevent full understanding of another's situated knowledges (Sotirin, 2020). Furthermore an issue of bias may arrive as it is reasonable to say that a researcher's background can affect the chosen topic, methods, and conclusions. With this in mind it is pertinent to maintain a sense of reflexivity; being wary of assumptions and preconceptions of the object of study. This thesis is concerned with

understanding pervasive antifeminist discourse within the American far right in hopes of bringing a heightened awareness to their interconnected ideologies that have gained fervent support in the last decade. I do not claim to have power in changing the discourse of the far right through this thesis but hope to contribute to more constructive interplay between the new wave of antifeminists and intersectional feminists. For this reason it is pertinent for this methodological analysis to be wary of reproducing hegemonic perspectives and be conscientious of social, cultural, and political complexities. As a woman who holds privilege in the society I live, it is crucial to take into account how I may act complicitly in upholding systems of discrimination. Furthermore, I find it ethically necessary to convey the complexities of lived experience, in this way it may make it more difficult for opposing forces to deny the need for social justice (Sotirin, 2020).

CHAPTER 3 Results: Discourses of antifeminism

3.1 The Social Wrong

The social aspect focused on is the deconstruction of the feminist movement and the reinforcing of ultraconservative values through discourses of antifeminism. Masculinist antifeminism, nationalist antifeminism, and religious antifeminism are common themes in addition to essentialism, othering, and antagonism. Antagonism is concerned with the identification of an enemy, the we/they distinction, and can be used in a wider theoretical frame as Mouffe (2005) posits the political permeates all dimensions. The aforementioned we/they distinction can be used as a political strategy and consequently lead to polarization. Antagonism calls attention to groups and individuals and the manner in which they are mobilized by passions and emotions. The *antagonistic frontier* relates to the discursive construction of the 'people' and the way in which populism acts as a discursive political strategy (Mouffe, 2005). A major key for success for far right populists is having a dominant narrative and strategically utilizing mainstream and social media, constructing the in group's reality. Having a large platform gives you power to control narratives and reproduce pessimistic rhetoric regarding social issues (Wodak, 2019). Far right populist commentators and political activist's, as well as party leader's, biggest selling point is their authenticity as a part of the 'people'. They understand the challenges and trials of the ordinary person because they [are] an ordinary person- not elitists or intellectuals. They posit that they think for themselves and their beliefs are rooted purely in common sense. Popular commentators and officials reach wide audiences by giving sensational or fanatic issues verisimilitude. In this way they gain the trust of the majority in-group and/or fill the role of a

leader by “having the necessary courage to say what the woman/man in the street only thinks” (Wodak, 2019, p.31). Additionally, they are in opposition to those in power and political correctness.

These themes were selected as they have social consequences and relate to salient issues in American society, which CDA is itself concerned with analyzing. The common themes also lend a hand to common articulation of discourses by the speakers and writers. These discourses of antifeminism show that there is a perception of a certain, correct and absolute, way to be a woman- specifically the correct way to be an American woman. Additionally, antifeminist discourse diminishes the societal and systemic inequalities and violence women are subjected to, not only in the United States but globally. In this case it is the feminist women who challenge the status quo and the women within the far right that attempt to uphold power imbalance through constructed realities and sensationalism.

The first step of the dialectical-relational approach of CDA is to focus upon a social wrong, in its semiotic aspects. In keeping with the above themes and theories, there will be semiotic points of entry into antifeminism and its discursive relationship with society as this discourse manifests polarized identities, essentialism, and nationalist, masculinist, and religious sentiments that operate as ingrained parts of the American social and institution. For this thesis the popular antifeminist discourses are reconstructed and respread by the following individuals; (1) Candace Owens: author and political commentator with over thirteen million followers across social media platforms (notable as contemporary social media influence can correspond with power). Owens is

notable for being unapologetically antifeminist, creating organizations to help influence African Americans to vote for right wing candidates, and calling Donald Trump the ‘savior’ of the free world. She is vocal about being anti-Black Lives Matter, anti-abortion, denying climate change and denying the rise in white nationalism alongside comments that racism is a lie to control and instill fear in black Americans (Zadrozny, 2018). Additionally, she worked for Turning Point USA, a non-profit organization promoting conservative values to young people, mainly through chapters on college campuses;

(2) Lauren Boebert: a member of the United States House of Representatives from Colorado, receiving nearly 164,000 votes in the midterm elections of 2022. She rose in notoriety for her brazen defense of gun ownership, including assault weapons, which she infamously continually has strapped to her in public appearances, and her toleration of the extremist hate groups that make up her base (Lofholm, 2020);

(3) Marjorie Taylor Greene: also a member of the House of Representatives, representing Georgia and receiving over 170,000 votes in 2022. She rose to popularity among the far right as she has continuously supported QAnon, a far right political movement and conspiracy theory rooted in antisemitism, anti-LGBTQ+, and the existence of an elite Satanic cabal trafficking children (among many other theories), that the FBI has labeled a potential domestic terrorist threat (Holoyda, 2022). She is speculated to be a contender for Donald Trump’s running mate in the 2024 presidential elections (Wu, 2022);

(4) Kayleigh McEnany: former press secretary for the White House under the Trump administration. McEnany has been labeled a conservative propagandist, and has come under scrutiny for downplaying the threat of the coronavirus to national audiences in addition to perpetuating the rumor that former president Barack Obama was born in Kenya, making him an illegitimate president (also allegeding his brother still lives in a ‘hut’ there) (McKelvey, 2020). McEnany also

faced backlash for her idolization of known misogynist Rush Limbaugh (McEnany, 2021 & Filipovic, 2021). She now is a popular political commentator and author with an online reach of over six million.

The chosen discourses are symptomatic of modern antifeminism in the United States, spearheaded by women within the far right mythos. These examples extend from speeches, interviews, government documents, social media posts, and self written articles and websites. The cases have an interdiscursive aspect as their similar features and tones conduce slanted conceptions of feminism, the quiddities of womanhood, and the validity of certain social groups. Discourse about antifeminism from people with large platforms consequently is able to influence popular opinion and social practice and interaction. Harmful conceptions about social issues (especially those that come from a place of power) are salient as they can infiltrate conventional society and even institutional policy thus amplifying and compounding systems of oppression for the target out group. This critical analysis is focused on the dismantling of the validity of feminism through multiple intersections of identity. This process is deliberate to sustain patriarchal tradition in the ideologies of the rising generation of women. "What is buried in the past of one generation falls to the next to claim" (Griffin, 2015).

3.2 Recognizing Obstacles to Addressing the Social Wrong

Wilde (2018) posits that discursive construction and normalization constitute the far right by undermining progress towards social justice with discourses that are antifeminist (as well as racist, anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant, or related to national security). Diverse identities are denied validity on grounds of the 'natural'. These discourses of Owens, Boebert, Greene and McEnany have commonalities including an infatuation with a presupposed 'natural' based in religion and gender normatives, consequently undermining the validity of LGBTQ+ individuals and appealing to homophobia. Furthermore there is an antagonistic perception of differing viewpoints, recollections of a 'better time' in history and allusions to the military and virility, and unctuous accounts of the bravery it takes to be 'conservative'. In addition they spread misinformation about the goals and necessity of feminism.

Appeals to a presupposed natural in antifeminist discourse include religious reference, such as, "The devil can not create life, he only destroys it. Women have been sold a vicious lie, a destructive lie, the most evil lie in history. Kill your baby to live a 'better life'. Therefore abortion causes women to do the very opposite that God created us to do"(Greene, 2022a). Marjorie Taylor Greene's use of polarizing words like 'devil', 'kill', and 'god' situates abortion negatively, allowing for the assumption that people who seek or perform abortions are working through evil and are in direct opposition to Christianity. She invokes a sense of threat with the use of 'destroy' and 'destructive' in concordance with 'devil' and 'kill'. Greene oversimplifies the issue of abortion to vilify people who may have undergone the procedure. "Kill your baby to have a 'better life'" works with the assumption individuals acted selfishly and children died because of it. In addition, the use of 'sold' in regards to the 'lie' indicates that someone is doing the selling. The devil?

Feminist activists? The Democratic party? It leaves room to speculate that those advocating for abortion and reproductive rights are siding with darkness, in a Christian perspective. This furthers the antagonistic reality, the we/they, good and evil. Discourses surrounding natural gender norms are also prevalent. Candace Owens (2019) commented on how modern feminism tricks women into fighting nature saying; feminism is “telling women ‘You don't need a man! You don't need a man! You should want to do everything by yourself’ and ‘if you do aspire to that, if you aspire toward nature, that there's something wrong with you’”. Owens misconstrued the feminist goal of female self sufficiency with experiencing life alone, in this way the audience is equating feminism with loneliness and a heteronormative partnership with a natural aspiration. There is an aspect of victimization in the use of ‘something wrong with you’ supposedly coming from feminism advocates, though heteronormative relationships and family structures have never been targeted as illegitimate in American society. She also commented on the child of a famous athlete who came out as a transgender girl saying; “His son now says that he is a woman and ... ‘this is who he’s always been.’ No it’s not! You’re not going to tell me that your child is wearing long nine-inch nails and a belly shirt because that’s just how they came out... Your child learned this behavior because there was an absence of masculinity in that child’s life ”(Levesque, 2021). This comment actively misgenders the individual (who was only 13 years of age at the time), invalidating transgender identities. Owens uses stereotypical imagery of women’s fashion in an attempt to make the child’s transition have an air of ridiculousness. ‘Nine-inch nails’ and ‘belly shirts’ are also more commonly worn by young women and adult women, not prepubescent girls. This adds a supposed immorality of transgender individuals by conflating a 13 year old child with adult dress, this may speak to wider debates surrounding the sexualization of LGBTQ+ children. Owens

equates gender identity with learned behavior in direct contrast with ‘how they came out’ meaning how they were born. She points to an absence of masculinity as reason for deviance. This highlights the notion of a necessary masculinity; a necessity that will keep children from deviance. Furthermore in regards to gender normatives Owens commented on the topic of women in successful career positions saying, “Men don’t like women that act like men unless they’re gay, right? I mean that, literally like they're not looking for women that act like men” (Owens, 2019). This highlights the supposed correct way and incorrect way to behave and be as a woman. ‘Women that act like men’ in this case are situated unnaturally and makes assumptions on what should and should not be attractive. This conveys that women should be feminine in order to attract men and adds to a heteronormative, feminine/masculine juxtaposition. The use of ‘act’ can invoke notions of masquerading; women masquerading in masculinity instead of following the rules of femininity.

Nostalgic call backs to history, a ‘better time’, help to perpetuate reverence for tradition.

Antifeminist discourse works to convince people that the modern movement is dishonoring the American past. Owens stated, “what’s happened is that feminism, a word that used to mean something, that used to be a time where women really, we did need to fight for equal rights like the right to vote in this country, well what the left is really good at doing is hijacking a term that once meant something and pretending that it’s still the same thing” (Owens, 2019). In saying this Owens is positing the defunctness of contemporary feminism. She invalidates modern gender disparities and calls for progress by saying that the most basic rights to have (like the right to vote), should be enough. The term ‘hijacking’ has negative connotations and paints modern

feminists as thieving from early feminists and therefore disrespecting American history and tradition. McEnany (2013b) echoes these sentiments in a self written online article;

“Distinct from the first wave of feminists in the 1800s who fought for women’s suffrage or the second wave in the mid-twentieth century who sought freedom from their traditional role in the homes, the third wave of contemporary feminists has no structure or definition. They amount to little more than a sad muddled mix of disparate causes seeking to challenge the definition of what it means to be feminine... The feminists of today are the equivalent of the whining rich kid, whose parents toiled through great pains to provide them with a future they can’t respect or cherish because they have no grasp of real repression, real struggle, and real liberation... Our feminist foremothers exhibited true, unadulterated courage. What we see today is far from that. It looks a lot more like attention-seeking, shallow cowardice.”

This allusion calls attention to the American tradition, a tradition nearly sacred to the far right as nationalism is intertwined into the tradition. She posits that feminism today is distinctly contrasting the early women’s rights movements. Though they made strides for more rights that does not mean there are not existing feminist issues to be addressed. The use of ‘muddled’, ‘mix’, and ‘disparate’ invokes a sense of disorganization or confusion. ‘Whining rich kid’ allows for a sense of childishness and ungratefulness, to be placed upon feminist complaints. She also references early feminists, similarly to Owens, in a way that situates modern feminism as disrespectful to tradition and history. McEnany uses ‘grasp of real’ (e.g. ‘real repression’) to

invalidate pushes for progress, and ignores the subjugation of masses of women under patriarchal systems. Owens briefly highlighted her affinity for tradition in her speech titled “The Scam of Feminism”, given to young women between the ages of 15 and 27. Owens (2019) gave an anachronistic equivalency:

“This is the week of ya know, D-day. We're celebrating the 75th anniversary of D-day. {loud cheering} Where men, who the average age for those men I believe was 22 years old- uh- 50% of them died, 50% of them were sat there on that beach and that's what it meant to be a man back then; to be so young and to risk your life for freedom. And today we have men and we have women um that can't deal with Ben Shapiro speaking on campus, right, they just- ‘too much!’- right? They can't deal with Steven Crowder's Youtube page. Everything is *so* offensive, isn't that ridiculous? And so this means that we're at an extraordinary time in society and, I do believe that similar to- to World War II- where yes the men went to war but the women took care of things at home.”

This is a call back to traditional spheres of existence where men do the important work of nation building and defense while women sustain them through emotional support and home preservation (Sotirin, 2020). Owens uses allusions to WWII to spark nationalistic sentiment. In this way one can see how nationalism and masculinism are interwoven in the imaginaries of far right antifeminist discourse. Ben Shapiro and Steven Crowder are popular conservative media personalities known for often antagonizing individuals that deviate from right wing ideology. Owens mentions student pushback to allowing further proliferation of radical thought at their

school as ‘ridiculous’ and that they ‘can’t deal’ (meaning they are unable to cope) which raises notions of a prospective weakness of non-conservative students. The use of nationalistic imagery can lead to the allowance of boisterous defense of the military and police; within this defense marginalized groups can become a scapegoat (Sotirin, 2020). Boebert (2021b) is exemplary of this saying, “when boys start to play dress up, I’m grateful for the women who answer the call to battle.” She is referencing men who have transitioned into women by attaching a photo of the first transgendered woman to win a state beauty pageant. By attaching her photo, she has thus been made a target of Boebert’s supporters that share anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments. Boebert also purposely misgenders the individual which is known to have adverse psychological effects for transgendered people (Lisner, 2022). “Play dress up” is used to reinforce that there are natural gender norms and concrete sexual identities that people are attempting to misconstrue through costuming of the opposite sex. This statement works to commend service women and arouse nationalist sentiment while belittling a minority population. Making statements about a ‘battle’ in conjunction with a comment on a marginalized community may make the audience correlate that the marginalized community is what the nation needs to be protected from. Boebert (2021a) also added worry that feminism is causing national security threats; “Perhaps if the CIA was focused more on actual threats to our country’s infrastructure instead of making videos about intersectional feminism we wouldn’t have a gas shortage due to hackers right now”. In this way Boebert is positioning a foreign threat as an effect and feminism as a cause. The use of ‘actual’ in regards to threat dismisses the disparities caused by antifeminism; thus positing that antifeminism is not a genuine threat to the success of American society. She went on to call intersectional feminism an “ideological agenda that compromises national security” in a congressional letter to the acting

Secretary of the Navy, cosigned by other congressional members (Boebert et al, 2021). Her letter came after the United States Navy pledged to include diversity and inclusion training for recruits.

Boebert et al (2021) went on to say that:

“Intersectionality’s emphasis on dividing people into warring identity groups will have a negative impact on morale and readiness. While we are facing rising threats from powerful adversaries like Russia, China, and radical Islamic terrorism, the military needs to project strength and unity- not woke corporate HR policy. In order to be effective warfighters, our Sailors need to be united, not divided by the petty turf wars of left-wing academia”.

Intersectionality and inclusivity works recognize that lived experience differs based on where society places personal identities within the social hierarchy. Boebert posits that this results in divisiveness and ‘warring’. She also uses alarmism by mentioning Russia, China, and Islamic terrorism which have historically been situated in direct contrast to the American mythos and invoke to the audience a sense of looming threat. Later in the letter Boebert equates intersectional thought to being “anti-American” and that this training would harm military readiness. In addition she posited that intersectional feminist discourse is in direct contrast to respecting the police, military, and first responders- all of which are sacred in the far right belief structure.

In her same speech, “The Scam of Feminism”, Owens goes on to highlight the hardship of being a conservative woman to the young audience saying, “Sometimes you can actually feel alone, you can feel like you are the only person that's on the side of sanity but that's the point of having real

friendships, that's the point of being on the side of truth. Sometimes you might be the only warrior for the truth but you have to keep fighting” (Owens, 2019). Owens is communicating that feeling alone because of antifeminism and other conservative beliefs should not be cause for worry that the young audience may be wrong in those beliefs, but it is something to defend as those on the opposing side are being situated against sanity and therefore, insane. She once again alludes to imagery of war using terms like “warrior” and “fighting” in defense of a ‘truth’. It is common for right wing affiliated parties to champion an assumed truth or common sense. Owens goes on to say “I *believe* that feminism is scam and is not about uplifting women, it is about tearing women down. I think the strongest women in America today are conservative women, without a question” (Owens, 2019). This statement is antagonistic in nature, alluding to threats of female detriment at the hands of feminists. Owens reinforces the we/they distinction basing conservatism in strength and those that fall to the scam of feminism as weak. In reference to traditional family life she said: “You women in this room have to help me defend that. Use your platform to speak out against it and never ever let the left bully you. Remember that liberals cannot bully you”(Owens, 2019). In this way she legitimizes the role and value of traditional family and the vilification of the left. This call to action aids in the proliferation of antifeminism through young women and their social platforms.

Misinformation and misconstruing of issues related to feminism is also used to deter women from persuing feminist ideology. Greene posits that modern feminists are “too weak and pathetic to take care of themselves. They want a great big giant government to take care of them. It's such a hypocrisy. They claim they want the future to be female, but they aren't capable of taking care of

themselves" (Dworkin, 2021). The use of 'they' builds a differentiation of we and they. The 'we' are strong and the 'they' are not. Greene constructs hateful notions of 'they' with overwhelmingly critical and negative intonation and connotation. Owens (2019) shares a comment from a past viewer in front of her young audience, the comment says; "Today I'm 55, I'm unmarried, I'm past the age where I can have children, and I have to take medicine to help, to help keep me happy. I'm on medication. That is the scam of feminism. If there's anything I could go back and do, I would have warned myself against the scam of feminism". Owens is reiterating that feminism is detrimental to women, claiming unmarriedness and being childfree is a negative consequence of feminism. Her audience is now equating feminism with living an unhappy life, citing the use of medication to battle unhappiness. She goes on to say that "I am not a feminist, I am not a democrat, I am not a liberal, but I am happy. I am happy" (Owens, 2019). She repeats that feminism leads to unhappiness again saying, "Who is the most extreme feminist that you know today? ... and ask yourself a very simple question: 'Do you think those women are happy?' There's no chance that they're happy. There's no chance that they're happy!"(Owens, 2019). This speculation into the happiness of feminists further diminishes the role of feminism and its goals for female liberation by reducing it to a con to make women lead unfulfilling lives. The repeated use of 'happy' throughout her speech is used to concretely position her views as the way to be happy and feminism as the way to unhappiness. Owens mentions several notable women by name who she considers extreme feminists (replaced by the above ellipses), in doing so she holds power in controlling the narrative of feminist fulfillment. The rhetorical question of 'do you think those women are happy?' is not meant to elicit a response because she has already made a biased

assertion. She is able to diminish their contributions because they are not there to speak for themselves.

Owens also plays into the stereotype that feminism is founded on man-hating or misandry and defends men against feminism saying; “It’s not about equality with men, it’s about hating men. People that talk about toxic masculinity tend to be toxic feminists in my opinion. Feminism isn’t really for me, right, because I don’t hate men. I don’t. I think that that’s toxic in fact and this is something you will only hear here, you’re gonna hear this here, it’s something you guys are gonna learn *exclusively* here, men are not dropped off by the stork. We actually birth them okay (laughter). These are our fathers, these are our sons, these are our brothers. So we have to stand up for men. We-you can’t separate men from women, this is what the left doesn’t understand. They’re bitter and they’re angry and we have arrived in this society where men are treated like enemies” (Owens 2019). Owens uses statements that imply that the ideology is based in common sense by saying ‘you guys are gonna learn exclusively here’ that ‘men are not dropped off by the stork’. This is a given, but Owens says this to elicit a sense of ridiculousness to the opposing thought. Additionally she misconstrues the actuality of feminism stating it is about hating men. This is stated to young conservative women, an overwhelming majority of which have been raised in patriarchal families and participate in heteronormative relationships. This is interesting as statements such as these work to further alienate conservative women from feminism as they believe hating men is a prerequisite for feminist ideology. This positions complaints about male domination and patriarchal society as toxic. She uses the word ‘enemies’ in regard to men to elicit us versus them dichotomy where conservative women must defend their fathers, brothers, sons,

and husbands from toxic feminists. Anti-male factions of feminism are highlighted by conservative movements to discredit feminists as ‘man-haters’ (Hooks, 2000). Bell Hooks (2000) states this portrayal works with the assumption of an overwhelmingly lesbian feminist movement which appeals to homophobia. True feminism accepts that patriarchy and sexism negatively effects both men and women. The critique of male domination and imposed “sexist masculine identity” have been conflated with hatred of men on the basis of their gender (Hooks, 2000, p.68). Greene also shared saying; “I believe that white men are the most persecuted identity in America. Young white men are put at the bottom of the list, of so many things, and it started a long time ago” (Schmidt 2022). In this statement Greene panders to a certain identity group, white men. The context of this piece of discourse is unclear but invokes a sense of threat and victimhood to the identity group through the use of ‘persecuted’ and ‘put at the bottom’. In this way Greene uses the unfounded threat to motivate white men to defend themselves against growing social progression. A supposed threat to the status of white men may invoke sentiments of white nationalism and antifeminism.

Connotation of words used in relation to feminism and its opposition are completely contrasting. In regards to feminism the following words were used through the analyzed discourses: weak, extreme, scam, bitter, tearing, dividing, war/warring, hijacking, whining, toxic, disparate, radical, shallow, evil, agenda, bully, pretending, hate, angry. In regard to ideologies within the far right the following words were used: defend, nature, battle, sanity, real, truth, warrior, happy, protect. This constructs the antagonistic reality of far right social practice as the true people are threatened by darker forces.

3.3 Appraising whether the social order 'needs' the social wrong

Portraying feminism as a threat is critical for substantiating far right ideologies in the United States. The protagonists of this analysis employ concepts of nature and societal threat in an antagonistic way, contributing to societal stigmatization of the feminist movement as anti-American and radical. In doing so these women act as tools to reinforce the status quo. By making unifying claims such as this, the audience is able to sympathize with antifeminist discourse as they then become concerned with the preservation of the nation and the people. Focusing on discourses of antifeminism “allows for the implementation of a political and (inter)cultural agenda”(O’Regan & Betzel, 2015, p.11) within a predominantly patriarchal system. The audience then is inculcated with a presumed way of being and a way to respond when that way of being is not followed by others in society. There are societal and political implications as a result of the prevalence and adoption of antifeminist ideology; social practice is informed by discourse. Othering and marginalizing discourse misconstrues the goals of social justice movements such as the feminist movement, consequently making a large populace perceive it as inimical. Using popular (and therefore powerful) figures in employing antifeminism through different lenses such as nationalism and religion emboldens the everyday citizen to be unabashed in resonating with antifeminist discourse. This can create a cyclical process in regards to social issues as those acting against social justice motivate people to act in favor, which then causes want for retaliation, and so on; an incessant fight for change or regression. Additionally their discourse “legitimizes their

indifference to the suffering of the other” (O’Regan & Betzel, *ibid*), e.g. poor women will suffer more due to antiabortion discourse, but the women pushing this discourse will not be affected as they have resources to ensure they will always get the healthcare they need; they legitimize this disparity through religious morality. By adopting antifeminist stances based in nature, nationalism, and religion (which can intertwine with masculinism), Owens, Greene, Boebert, and McEnany alienate those with intersectional values, consequently relegating those that do not endorse an essentialist view of the American people and tradition. Subordination of intersectional feminist thought is employed to circumvent or revert progress “which might facilitate structural and institutional change” (O’Regan & Betzel, 2015, p. 12).

3.4 Identify possible ways past the obstacles

Identifying ways past the obstacle, past the social wrong, is subjective as it is contingent on various threads such as epistemological, political, or religious stances. For example, in a Foucauldian perspective one may engage with discourse by critically analyzing statements that present themselves as common sense, a truth. Engaging in such a way creates an opportunity for destabilizing dominant discourse. From an intersectional feminist viewpoint righting the social wrong may be aided by unantagonistic intercultural and interpersonal dialogue that highlight differing identities and their experience within a society, including the way in which antifeminist discourse has tangible effects on lived experience. Training or education centering contemporary disparities between men and women may assuage practices of gender based discrimination. Addressing systemic inequalities will mitigate risks involving gender based violence that disproportionately affects women of color, which in return will help ease racial and class

disparities. However, dominant discourses are not easily shaken. Even so, critical discourse analysis can be utilized to uncover and rectify harmful misconceptions and biases.

CHAPTER 4 Discussion: Societal Implications of Far Right Antifeminist Discourse

“In direct opposition to the courage, heart, and fortitude our foremothers exhibited, the 21st century feminists have proven cowardly, petulant, and weak as they attempt to continue a battle that has already been won” - Kayleigh McEnany (2013b)

Legitimization of far right discourses calls into question the legitimacy of non-traditional participation in the realms of family, marriage and subsequently the workforce, religion, and bodily autonomy. With the ascension of far right politics one can also note an increase in race based attacks, antisemitism, and an emphasis on maintaining the traditional nuclear family. Furthermore, far right policy upholds an aversion to the Welfare State, cutting back on social services and legal immigration paths. Cutbacks on social services affect women disproportionately more as women contribute more unpaid labor in society. Additionally, anti-immigration laws also strongly affect women as they “reinforce women’s structural dependence on men” (Seidel, 1988, p.7). In this way anti-feminism and race are intertwined. It is evident that it is not only overt antifeminist rhetoric that hurts women. This shows that feminism has not reached its end goal, women are still disproportionately effected by social issues even if they do not seem to pertain specifically to women’s rights. The minority populations occupy different structural and systemic positions within society, often being women and from black and brown communities, sometimes

with the amalgam of LGBTQ+ identities and disabled bodies and other intersections that further marginalize them. This causes major disparities between discourse produced about minorities from the majority, and discourse about minorities from the minority. Majority discourse frequently works to marginalize the minority and the periphery from which many of them come from. Contrastingly, minority discourse is concerned with the structural oppression of their groups and how the specific oppressions concerned with 'race', 'sex', and 'class' intertwine (Seidel, 1988). Breaking down the lexicons of majority discourse one can see a difference between 'us' and the 'other'. For example, popular terms used in the West like "ethnic minority" and "person of color", and even "African American" in the United States, situates whiteness as neutral. When being of a different race you are automatically grouped as something 'other', you are first marked by your ethnicity or race and your humanity second. Additionally, Sidell (1988) states women are situated as another natural other as they are seen as being bound to biology, motherhood, traditional femininity, and subservience. In this way, being black or brown and also a woman can situate someone at the bottom of the social hierarchy. These minority groups are constructed as natural, justifying their domination.

Discourse related to minority groups has frequently been grounded in sociobiology, especially fixed gender roles. In the majority discourse, the biological rationalizes the political (Seidell, 1988). In nations where fixed gender roles are seen as natural and a fixed part of the social hierarchy, one can also find an honoring of virility and destiny (features also found in fascist discourse). Virility is intertwined into the conceptions of the American national identity. One can see this represented in the emphasis of the military, the police force, and macho/masculine culture.

This is inherent in the ideologies of the political right. There are innate ways to be a man and to be a woman. Lacking masculinity is lacking manhood. Lacking manhood threatens the longevity of the nuclear family. If the nuclear family falls, so does the nation. The emphasis on masculinity and fixed gender roles have societal implications across a broad range of issues. Masculinist antifeminist discourse succeeds in controlling mainstream perceptions of how an individual is supposed to act in accordance with their sex. This shapes their role within the ‘people’, and if they are allowed to be a part of the ‘people’. Seidell posits that the “role of the sacred has been replaced by biology” (1988, p. 11). This understanding of society's structure upholds traditional conceptions of ‘man’s nature’ and ‘women’s nature’ that justify inequalities between the sexes (Seidell, *ibid*). The discourse of the far right denies women’s autonomy, invoking ideas of social darwinism, theology, and even eugenics. These themes all work together for the manipulation of women as the “male political project” (Seidell, 1988, p. 12). Biology has been forced onto women since girlhood as motherhood and heterosexuality are main factors in a girl’s socialization. Seidell (1988) discusses this socialization as an enforced identity where girl’s bodies are seen as a tool of labor. It is nearly a societal taboo for a woman to not want children. Additionally, motherhood is equated with selflessness, courage, and sanctity while being childfree is associated with selfishness and loneliness.

4.1 Women’s Reproductive Health

The far right in the United States centers sexual morality and family issues in political agenda to gain following. Utilizing politics surrounding family, sexuality, and reproductive rights helps individuals within the far right achieve state power. Fertility and birth rates among American women have been in steady decline (Chapman, 2022). This fact in combination with high rates of immigration into the United States have deadly consequences. The ‘great replacement theory’ made its way into mainstream far right discourses; a racist theory stating white Americans are actively being “replaced” by non-white immigrants (Rose, 2022). According to a poll, 61% of Trump voters and 53% of Fox News (a conservative cable program) viewers believe this theory. The same theory has arisen in parts of Europe, notably in Hungary. Viktor Orban reiterated on national television that migrants are replacing European Christian children (Rose, 2022). But how does this relate to feminist issues? Orban met with an American right wing group, Conservative Political Action Committee (CPAC), where its chairman suggested outlawing abortion as a way to stimulate population growth within their “own people” (Rose, 2022). Roe versus Wade, the Supreme Court decision that guaranteed a constitutional right to abortion, was overturned in June of 2022. Unequal access to abortion disproportionately affects low income women as they have less financial resources, fewer labor protections, and less schedule flexibility (D’Innocenzio & Olsen, 2022). People carrying unwanted pregnancies quadruple the odds that person and their child will live under the poverty line, and triple the chance that person will become unemployed according to a University of California study (D’Innocenzio & Olsen, 2022). Antiabortion policies substantiate the poverty cycle, especially for impoverished women- of those women, black and hispanic are the majority. In this way, white nationalism, poverty and antifeminism intersect. Bell Hooks (2000) stated that the feminist activists of the 60s and 70s would have never imagined they

would fight again for reproductive rights in the 90s, even more unimaginable would be fighting once again in 2022. Hooks (2000) posited that antifeminist backlash from right wing political movements depending on religious fundamentalism placed abortion rights on the chopping block.

Anti-abortion discourse calls into question until what point a woman has autonomy over their own body? Autonomy is at the core of basic rights and equality as well as privacy. The United Nations Human Rights Office said, “the decision as to whether to continue a pregnancy or terminate it, is fundamentally and primarily the woman’s decision, as it may shape her whole future personal life as well as family life and has a crucial impact on women’s enjoyment of other human rights” (2017, p.2). According to the World Health Organization, countries where abortion is restricted or illegal, safe pregnancy termination is a privilege of the upper classes (“Office of the United Nations”, 2017). Women with class privilege continue to have the right to choose (Hooks, 2000). Women with little resources often resort to unsafe procedures by unsafe providers. Unsafe abortions have resulted in 47,000 known deaths annually around the world (“Office of the United Nations”, 2017). Additionally, there is no evidence that restrictive abortion laws lower rates of abortion. This inequality “results in severe discrimination against economically disadvantaged women” (“Office of the United Nations”, 2017). In the case of the United States those who experience the highest rates of poverty are black women (21.1%), hispanic women (18.1%), and Native American women (20.3%); contrasting with just 8.1% of white women (National Women's Law Center, 2022). This means women of color are subjected to higher risks of serious injury or death from unsafe abortions or inescapable poverty cycles that keep their communities subjugated. Antiabortion movements targeted most harshly state-funded, low cost centers (Hooks, 2000).

“(I) am proud that my appropriation's request prohibiting federal tax dollars from funding abortions was signed into law.” - Lauren Boebert (2022)

Women in poverty or on the verge of being pushed into poverty also face crises regarding housing justice. In the wake of Roe versus Wade and the highest increase in rental prices in the last 35 years, people with unwanted pregnancies face harsh decisions (National Women's Law Center, 2022). Societal gender inequity allows women, especially those with intersecting identities, to be less likely to be able to afford rent prices. According to the National Women’s Law Center (2022), this means a pregnant person of lesser means may have to make a choice between affording an abortion and risk being evicted because of nonpayment or paying rent and having a child, thus risking not being able to afford to care for the child. Abortion bans that vary state to state now mean women seeking abortions may have to travel great distances, usually amounting in hundreds of dollars in expenses. Some states have now criminalized abortions, conceivably bringing about criminal charges to thousands of women. For this reason properties that conduct background checks on prospective tenants can disqualify people that have received an abortion. This creates added barriers to safe, accessible, and affordable homes and can push women and children into poverty (National Women's Law Center, 2022).

Issues regarding abortion rights have captured the most attention in terms of women’s reproductive health as it challenges Christian fundamentalist thought; that the purpose of women’s existence is childrearing (Hooks, 2000). Abortion access has helped amplify educational,

economic, and career opportunities for women and it is an integral part of working toward gender equality and justice (National Women's Law Center, 2022). While Roe versus Wade was intact, more women were enabled to graduate highschool and move on to higher education, enjoy economic independence, and compete in the workforce to their satisfaction. An argument by anti-abortion advocates, and reiterated by the Supreme Court, is that abortion access is unnecessary as there is greater gender equality (exemplified by developments in contraception, protection against pregnancy discrimination and paid leave)(National Women's Law Center, 2022). This is farcical as these standards are not universal and have not eliminated gender inequalities or alleviated burdens related to being forced to carry a pregnancy in economic, educational, and professional sectors.

While abortion is a critical aspect of women's rights other reproductive health crises go without attention. Hooks states that focusing on "abortion rather than reproductive rights as a whole reflected the class biases of the women who were at the forefront of the movement"(2000, p. 26); this being upper class white women. Other issues range from basic sex education and prenatal care to forced sterilization, unnecessary hysterectomies and cesareans and their longterm effects. The development of the birth control pill in the 1950s may have also had unknown effects on women's fertility. Hooks (2000) posits that the pill created by male scientists was not entirely safe, but the option for responsible birth control was more impactful for female sexual liberation. In a similar vein, Seidell (1988) states that as medical procedures become more and more advanced, the typically male, "hero scientists" can make large profits, as private medical practice is the norm in the United States. Consequently the high rate of infertility in women resulted from previous attempts by men to control fertility; e.g. through the birth control pill and IUDs (Seidell, 1988,

p.145-6). Contrastingly, it is important to push the idea that motherhood is essential to women's self-fulfillment. As long as women feel incomplete in the eyes of the state and society without children, women will pay large sums to reach motherhood through fertility treatment. Women's loss of bodily autonomy and the right to choose risks "relinquishing rights in all other areas of our lives" (Hooks, 2000, p.29).

Access to effective contraception and preventative healthcare for all women is an effective way to diminish the amount of unwanted pregnancies and need for abortion. Even so, right leaning individuals and organizations push abstinence teaching instead of sexual education. The right worked to restrict information about sex and birth control through legislative changes, and pushed abstinence amongst teenagers- as follows Christian teachings about sex and marriage (Seidell, 1988). Additionally, federal funds were pulled from schools who did not comply with the teachings. The Family Protection Act (FPA) gave parents an increased say so in their children's public schools, sometimes in the form of voluntary schoolwide prayer, censorship of textbooks, and promotion of chastity programs (Seidell, 1988). Another change required [both] parents of minors to consent to their child's use of contraceptives and abortion procedures. Accounting for the amount of girls under the age of 18 who live in single-mother households, the new conditions for accessing reproductive care would become restrictive, unequally affecting black and brown women and women of lower income (Seidell, 1988). These alterations increased problems related to sexual activity and furthered these problems by cutting social programs. Abstinence programs have not succeeded in lowering teen pregnancy or STD rates in the United States. The programs often push heterosexual sex within marriage as the "only appropriate context for sexual

intercourse”(McCammon, 2017). In a 2004 report prepared for House of Representatives Democratic delegates, concern was raised about abstinence curricula misleading students about abortion information and conflating religion and science. Additionally, this report outlined how abstinence teaching reinforces gender stereotypes including male aggression, female passivity and weakness, and undermines girl’s capacity for achievement (McCammon, 2017). This teaching has been expanded and heavily funded under right leaning administrations including recently under George W. Bush and Donald Trump (Smith, 2018).

Additionally, the ban on abortions has affected people of all genders in receiving healthcare whether it be reproductive care or not. Abortion care providers, or family planning centers, increasingly provided gender-affirming care for non-binary and transgender individuals (National Women's Law Center, 2022). Access to gender affirming treatments like hormone therapy and puberty blockers is essential for transgender youth’s bodily autonomy and control over their future. Without these resources transgendered youth have higher risks regarding mental health issues including body dysmorphia, anxiety, and depression, among others. These healthcare centers also provided fertility preservation options as later treatment could affect their fertility (National Women's Law Center, 2022). Far right groups with the help of politicians have already begun attacking these options specifically, attempting to ban hormone therapy and puberty blocking treatment. According to the National Women’s Law Center (2022), several states are working to criminalize all gender-affirming care for transgendered youth- directly against the standards of medical best practice. An increasingly worrying notion is that gender-affirming care is “child abuse”, a claim substantiated by far right commentators and elected officials. This is

worrying as it threatens families that support their children's medical treatments with child abuse investigations and requires medical professionals and teachers to report suspicions of "child abuse" to the authorities (National Women's Law Center, 2022). Furthermore, parents are urged to have intersex infants undergo "normalizing" surgeries that are not medically necessary. According to the National Women's Law Center (2022) these surgeries are usually before the age of two, before they are able to consent or understand the lifelong impacts it will cause to their health and fertility. This strips young children of their bodily autonomy and in some cases can sterilize them. These harmful surgeries are written into the same state and federal bills proposed by far right politicians that would outlaw gender-affirming care for transgender youth, seeking to codify them into law (National Women's Law Center, 2022). Abortion access and healthcare for transgender and intersex people are enmeshed, for this reason feminist organizations and LGBTQ+ organizations work for the same goals; protecting reproductive rights, personal autonomy, and striving for gender equality.

"Years from now people are going to say in disgust, there was a time in America where legislators fought to slaughter full-term babies, castrate boys, cut breast off of girls... History will not be kind. Nor will God." -Marjorie Taylor Greene (2022c)

4.2 A Woman's Work

Class difference can be noted as one of the main issues dividing feminist movements (Hooks, 2000). Women entering the workforce rarely shared burdens of household work with their male partners. In the mid-twentieth century women were under the impression joining the workforce would “liberate women from male domination” (Hooks, 2000, p. 48). Many women work as invisible, shadow workers, doing labor not recognized as important, worthy, respectable; e.g. cleaning, maintaining homes, childcare, cooking. This is common globally. In today's society it is not unusual for a woman to hold a fulltime job and also be expected to do this unpaid and unthanked labor. This disparity is exacerbated by the gaps in pay wages that have gone unaddressed in all sectors. Though there have been equal pay laws in place for the last 50 years, nationally on average, women earn only 83 cents for every dollar their male counterparts earn (National Women's Law Center, 2022). This is worse when looking specifically at women of color in relation to white men; black women on average make only 64 cents, and hispanic women make only 57 cents. This inconsistency means a woman entering the workforce today can lose hundreds of thousands of dollars over their career and in eleven states women's career losses cost them over half a million dollars. According to the National Women's Law Center (2022), this gap occurs across 94% of occupations and throughout all education levels. Women's labor is devalued. The difference in wages occurs [because] the jobs are done by women. Women, particularly women of color, are overrepresented in low wage labor and underrepresented in higher-wage roles (National Women's Law Center, 2022). Within American society there is a hesitancy or taboo surrounding

salary discussion. This has a lot to do with employers discouraging their employees from comparing wages as their underpaid staff may find out their true market value and ask for compensation. Secrecy about pay allows employers to exploit and devalue jobs held by women. For this reason salary transparency can aid in closing the gender wage gap (National Women's Law Center, 2022). Efforts to change gender-based workforce discrimination positively impacted all women, even so, these efforts overwhelmingly helped women with class privilege receive equity with men of their class (Hooks, 2000). Large numbers of women still do not have wage equality. Class, race, and sex intersect as feminist reform helped gain social equality for women within existing class structures. Hooks (2000) notes this coincides with white supremacist, patriarchal fears surrounding the loss of white class power if people of color were to have equal access to economic power and privilege. As white women share the profits of class oppression they “find it easier to consider divesting of white supremacist thinking than of their class elitism” (Hooks, 2000, p.41) so they participate in euro-imperialist tradition rather than advocating equity for the less privileged.

Having economic freedom increases the likelihood a woman will leave male partnered relationships (Hooks, 2000). Patriarchal tradition makes this kind of liberation difficult as women have been historically and contemporarily economically tethered to men. In recent history, in an attempt to reinforce women's dependence on men, the far right in the United States sought to ratify the FPA (Seidell, 1988). This act included tax breaks for men whose wives chose to stay home and as well as restricting teachings in school that differed from traditional family views.

“This is one of the great lies of modern feminism- is that these women get on this corporate ladder believing this makes them more attractive to men, like men is not looking at a woman going ‘well i hope she makes six figures’ right? They're looking at a woman and they're thinking ‘is she going to be the mother of my children?’ Im telling you it's like this weird lie that has been implanted in everybody's head; ‘the more successful i become, the more men are going to want me’ and in reality, what is really does is it makes men feel smaller in a lot of ways” -Candace Owens (2019)

The state is allowed to define what constitutes social need, in the mid twentieth century only single-mothers were allowed to receive welfare. Seidell (1988) argues that this actually led men to leave families as they could not subsist without help from welfare. The state, in an attempt to lower the dependency on welfare, cutback aid to these “welfare mothers” and “coerced” men back to their families and into low wage labor (Seidell, 1988). This attack on welfare has not eased the problem. In this way an attack on women’s reproductive health can reinforce existing disparities between races and classes as unwanted pregnancies are made harder by lack of social support. Subsequently, these inequalities are stiffened by privatizing and commercializing family services, creating more burden on families- especially those with less means (Seidell, 1988). Women who face these challenges have to deal with extra burdens as attacks on welfare mean women have to participate in more unpaid labor. The lack of feminist protest regarding government attacks on welfare and single mothers substantiated further that women of class privilege fail to show solidarity with those without class privilege (Hooks, 2000). This is opportunistic feminism as class power is “gained at the expense of the freedom of other women” (Hooks, 2000, p. 52).

All parents face challenges while juggling careers and their children. For mothers, the challenges weigh quite a bit heavier. Women who are visibly pregnant face workplace discrimination as they are seen to be more irrational and emotional, and less committed and authoritative than their male and non-pregnant female counterparts (National Women's Law Center, 2022). In addition, mothers have harder times finding new jobs or being rehired than fathers (National Women's Law Center, 2022). The combination of the gender pay gap, unpaid labor, and discrimination may work to further women's dependency on men and remain fulfilling roles within the gender normative. In many cases, instead of helping to ease women's burdens when it comes to earning a living while balancing caregiving responsibilities, the overwhelming discourse praises them for their hard work. "Being a mother is the hardest job in the world"- an expression everyone has heard in their lifetime and repeated by Candace Owens (2019) in her speech "The Scam of Feminism", but there is a reason it is the hardest job. Mothers are commended for their strength and near 'superhuman' abilities for surviving in a society that does not support them. Instead of praising women for overcoming adversities, it would be more helpful to strengthen support systems and act to eliminate the adversities (National Women's Law Center, 2022). According to the National Women's Law Center (2022), this may include ensuring affordable childcare, ensuring paid family and medical leave for all workers, ensuring all families can access child tax credits, universal free pre-kindergarten, and expanded access to community based services. Hooks (2000) posits that women's unification and dismantling of patriarchal systems of oppression can not come to fruition until class issues are addressed. The subordination of women of color upholds white supremacist patriarchy, benefitting white women's economic equality. Feminist women of privilege should

therefore work to alleviate class stratifications by helping to ensure unprivileged women have the same resources and opportunities for economic and personal growth. An intersectional feminist should concern themselves with efforts to further employing women in better paying jobs irregardless of class instead of focusing on careerism which alienates poor and working class women (Hooks, 2000). Hooks (2000) offers ways past economic dependence on men and therefore women's liberation; allowing subsidized wages for those who want to stay at home and raise children or participate in home-schooling, repairing welfare services and granting men equal access to welfare to destigmatize its gender aspect, and salary increases for professions dominated by women like teachers and service workers.

“In reality, though, the only “whiff of a moldy anachronism” is trying to pretend that women are somehow still severely disadvantaged in comparison to men.

Women have been on par with men for some time. It's time for women to commend our feminist foremothers for a job well done, and to tell the feminists of the 21st century it's time to pack up, go home, and find a new cause.” - Kayleigh McEnany (2013a)

Antifeminist discourse discounts the intersections of race and class and the way in which societal gender inequalities are perpetuated because of them. In this way attacks on welfare and the

devaluation of women's work create economic bondage and therefore stunt efforts toward women's liberation.

4.3 Gender Norms & Gender Based Violence

Kushnarenko (2019) states that “the idea of what it means to be a man or a woman is so central to our identity because when we grow up, we learn that we are boys or girls before anything else”. The natural hierarchies and subordinations of society are based in the belief that the patriarchy is also natural. Traditional masculinity is based in domination. To maintain this social order, the nuclear family is of utmost importance as it is the main social institution in which allegiance is learned. The family is where a child learns to be a citizen of the state, therefore, protection of the nuclear family is essential as families are the “basic unit of society” (Seidell, 1988, p.142). This coincides with the concept of “Republican Motherhood”, a term used to advocate public discourse starting all the way back to the beginning of the American republic and throughout the twentieth century (Sotirin, 2020). In this conception mothers are the conservators of virtue and patriotism and the wardens of “private life morality” (Sotirin, 2020, p.84). With this in mind, one cannot reduce the political to state-institutions. The private sphere is one of the main mediums for the reproduction of political power and relations of domination, along with organized civil society, the public sphere, and discourse of knowledge (Wilde, 2018). According to Wilde (2018), the family is the nucleus of political society. She states, “the family becomes the authority of political order, a model, a collective, as well as the location and realm of hard-working, virtuous women” (Wilde,

2018, p.99). This in turn justifies the state's right to encourage certain forms of family, particularly one that adheres to traditional patriarchal standards. If the patriarchal family dynamic is reevaluated on individual levels, who is to say this challenge will not come on a societal level. Far right activists claim the imposition of sexuality and gender as means for their aversion to nontraditional identities, positing the destruction of a healthy nation as a consequence of tolerance (Kushnarenko, 2019).

“Parents raise your boys to be men and protect them from teachers who try to deceive them to become women. Guard your children from such monsters in these evil days.” -Marjorie Taylor Greene (2022b)

Parents have the power to dominate the discourse and ideologies a child learns, though these are always subject to change; the values of the parent are passed on and can become the values of the child (Seidell, 1988). Through book bannings and other forms of censorship parents who submit to far right ideology work to ensure their children do not have access to media and texts that skew from the traditional nuclear family and perceptions of womanhood and manhood (Seidell, 1988). The perceived threat can sometimes create nonissues or moral panics that cause material harm to marginalized communities. Exemplary of this contemporarily is the harm that comes to LGBTQ+ community through misinformation regarding homosexuality and the transgender community and a more niche moral panic regarding drag queens. In an authoritarian organization “role models and practices that appear threatening to the state's stability are marginalized”, and therefore create a rift between the legitimate and illegitimate ways to express gender identity (Wilde, 2008, p.114).

Candace Owens recently equated drag queens reading books to children to child abuse and Marjorie Taylor Greene stated she wanted to introduce a bill making it illegal for children seeing drag (Robinson, 2022). Robinson (2022) states that this has garnered quite a bit of outrage from right leaning individuals as popular commentators and government officials posit members of the LGBTQ+ community are child groomers, pedophiles, and predators. The defiance of strict gender norms is seen as a threat, some going on to say that because same sex couples cannot have traditional pregnancies in most cases, they need to recruit unsuspecting children (Robinson, 2022). There has been a great shift in acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities in the United States over the last thirty years, though this has come partly from a continual insistence “that they pose no threat to the established order”(Robinson, 2022). However, discourse like the examples above still continue to cause great harm to societal others. Greene recently publicly shamed a local drag queen during a speech; sharing their name, photograph, and social media accounts. Greene then encouraged her supporters to send them a ‘message’ (Lieberman, 2022). Directly following this stunt the individual was inundated with anti-LGBTQ+ hate speech, harassment, and death threats. This is just one example of how discourse can have very real material consequences. Violence against the LGBTQ+ community disproportionately affects women, particularly transgender women of color, a majority of whom are black. From an intersectional viewpoint one can see how anti-transgender speech, antifeminism, and racism intertwine to affect the most marginalized communities. Transgender women face higher rates of fatal violence than their respective counterparts (“Fatal Violence Against the Transgender”, 2021), making it not only a LGBTQ+ issue but a feminist issue.

On the other hand, cisgendered men are killed at a much higher rate than cisgendered women. It is still important to focus on violence against women as this violence is ingrained in our society and women are killed in distinctly different ways than men (Gerster, 2020). The perpetuation of gender inequalities creates an obvious power imbalance, leading to differences in gender-based violence. Gerster (2020) states men are more often killed in gang-related violence and random crimes while women are killed more often by romantic partners. Women are killed in intimate relationships and power-based crimes, which is almost always not the case for men. According to Gerster (2020), gender inequality plays a major role in this case. Factors such as the wage gap, lack of family planning resources (contraceptives, abortion access, affordable childcare options), and the devaluation of women's labor play a role in the wider reasons for female victimization. These issues contribute to reasons for risk factors associated with who is a victim, who is the perpetrator, and how are the two related (Gerster, 2020). Women are brutalized and killed in the home more often than out of the home (Hooks, 2000). This trauma creates a cycle of violence as children in the home are also often victims of violence or obtain emotional scarring. Feminism is crucial in addressing domestic violence as well. Patriarchal violence is a concept that accepts the legitimacy of a more powerful individual substantiating control over another through force (Hooks, 2000). This is a wider concept that includes male to female violence, same sex violence, and adult violence to children. Hooks (2000) posits that the concept of patriarchal violence is more useful as it emphasizes that violence is intertwined to sexism and male domination and clarifies that women can also participate in domestic violence. Sexism upholds male domination and consequently violence. Power is enmeshed in masculinity and the traditional conceptions of American family life where men are seen as the absolute authority. Using violence may be a way for some men to

establish dominance “within the sexist sex role hierarchy” as society progresses womens role in outside labor and men ‘lose’ power (Hooks, 2000, p.65).

“Women are the lesser vessel and we need masculinity in our lives to balance that, that so-called weakness.” - Lauren Boebert (Swanson, 2022)

The normativity of male violence in the United States can be linked to imperialist militarism (Hooks, 2000). It is no secret the sacrecy placed upon military and battle in the construction of the American identity. Hooks (2000) states that boys are socialized in a constructed ‘good guy’ versus ‘bad guy’ narrative; this imaginary raises soldiers with imperialist tendencies. This is utilized by the state to maintain global might; “a coercive power over nations” (Hooks, *ibid*). As this sexist socializing persists, so does patriarchal violence. For these reasons feminism must concern itself with efforts to end all forms of violence including war. This may start with nonviolent parenting and non sexist socialization of boys and girls. Regarding sexual violence, in relation to the #MeToo movement, which brought attention to victims of sexual assault and publicized people’s (overwhelmingly women’s) experiences to call attention to just how big and prevalent of a problem sexual violence is, Owens equates the movement to merely a social media trend. “It’s not popular to say something against the movement that’s trending but this is wrong. This felt like a part of something that’s larger, a war on men. I believe in due process. Of course i never ever want a woman to go through something as horrible and horrific as sexual assault or rape but i believe in due process. And yeah you should applaud that” (Owens, 2019). These same sentiments were echoed by McEnany (2015) in regards to high levels of sexual assault on college campuses;

“The blameless are sacrificed at the ideological altar of radical feminism” and “the rabid feminists loudly proclaim and denounce the so-called ‘rape epidemic’ on college campuses, all the while ignoring the ‘justice epidemic’ they have created. At the hand of feminists, college campuses are quickly becoming microcosms of injustice – where no rape accusation is a false accusation and all men are guilty by virtue of their gender. At the helm of this mob justice is none other than Hillary Clinton, who issued a battle cry to her feminist sisters on Twitter last month: ‘Every survivor of sexual assault deserves to be heard, believed, and supported.’ Heard? Absolutely. Believed and supported? That’s for a court to determine”

This comes after growing attention by feminists to the lack of prosecution, conviction, and punishment of male sexual offenders. The same year McEnany made these statements national media attention surrounded the rape of an unconscious female college student by another student on the Stanford University campus. With witness testimony and DNA evidence he was convicted with three felony accounts for rape and sexual assault but was only sentenced to six months in prison, of which he only served three (Keneally, 2018). The arrest of accused offenders is the least likely outcome according to a criminology and justice study (Webster, 2019). Additionally, less than seven percent of reports made to police led to convictions. This may be due to prosecutors often declining to file charges and lengthy investigations causing cases to fall apart. Webster (2019) notes police and prosecutors blame victims for low conviction, citing lack of cooperation but this is problematic as sexual assault victims often claim being disrespected by police during investigation. This process is also made more difficult for those with less means as lengthy

investigations means more travel to and from interviews, taking time from work, and finding childcare (Webster, 2019). Cases about sexual assault often take years to prosecute, meaning victims must relive in a way their assault and the trauma received from it. Additionally, arrests were declined to proceed because of judgments about the victims' behaviors being 'risky' (e.g. alcohol and drug use, mental health concerns) and the belief a jury would not convict if risky behaviors were involved (Webster, 2019). This is unsubstantiated as less than one percent of rape and sexual assault accusations were resolved through jury trial, meaning hypotheses on conviction rates and risky behaviors have little to no evidence (Webster, 2019). Additionally, sexual assault cases that end in conviction are often overly lenient on the offenders. This dissuades victims from speaking out as the trauma of reliving the assault through years of investigation and trial may lead to a 'slap on the wrist' for offenders. Offenders often urge leniency stating worries about school admissions, career opportunities, and social shunning and victims are told pressing charges may ruin a man's life. In 2017 a 16 year old highschool student raped and recorded a female peer at house party, distributing the video evidence to friends and admitting to the rape over text (Ferré-Sadurní, 2019). The presiding judge denied movements to try the offender as an adult citing a "traditional case of rape" involves more than one man using a gun or other weapon to take advantage of someone in a shady place. According to Ferré-Sadurní (2019) the male judge questioned the victims validity on means of intoxication and said she should have been told pressing charges would destroy the accused's life. He then dismissed the admission of guilt over text as "just a 16-year-old kid saying stupid crap to his friends"(Ferré-sadurní, 2019). The judge cited that the boy came from a "good family" and was doing well at a good school for his reason for leniency. Over a decade earlier the same judge prohibited a courtroom from discussing a

prominent case involving the sexual assault of highschool student by two football players, this case was then eventually dropped (Ferré-sadurní, 2019). These cases are just two examples of the thousands that go unprosecuted, unreported, and unpunished.

This speaks to the continuation of violence against women as a result of discourses of masculinity including sexual objectification and male nature. The statements by Owens and McEnany are founded on the small percent of false allegations by women but do not recognize the overwhelming amount of erroneous vindications for male offenders, especially privileged males. This speaks to a wider issue of judicial and societal victim blaming and patriarchal dominance as courts often protect men's futures over granting justice for women. This is systemic violence innacted against women to uphold the status quo and reinforces outdated notions of sexual domination of women. The above discourses are harmful as they place greater suspicion on those who allege sexual assault and grant more credence on courts that often fail to be just. Strides for women's liberation include freedom from all realms of violence including sexual. This cannot come to fruition until judiciary and law enforcement systems unravel patriarchal standards of practice that protect offenders regardless of gender from the consequences of their actions. Advancing resources for victims and departments presiding over their cases may be the first step.

4.4 Religion and Antifeminism

Antifeminism can also be linked to Christian zealously within the far right. Women in most Western societies have historically held little institutional power as a result of discouragement based in religious tradition (Sotirin, 2020). Many men and women concur that based on church teachings women should submit to men, women should not be in leadership positions over men, and even sometimes that women are the reason for sin as Eve was the one deceived and not Adam (Harris & Duncan, 2018). There is a specific identity politics surrounding motherhood (Wilde, 2018). In a Christian dominated society childlessness can be seen as tragedy as “a woman’s body has a rhythm, a history, and a fulfillment that are centered upon the bearing of children: this is what it means to be a woman” (Seidell, 1988, p.143). This fully denounces the identity of a woman, diminishing her existence down to her bodily functions as though they are a tool of the sacred or the state. Though this statement is archaic in nature, women still face discrimination because of socially-constructed gender roles like these. Christian fundamentalism encourages the assumption that inequality is natural, that the female body is a tool to be controlled, and imposes repressive notions of gender and sexuality (Hooks, 2000).

“I’m going to tell you right now what is a woman. We came from Adam’s rib. God created us with his hands. We may be the weaker sex, we are the weaker sex, but we are our partner’s, our husband’s, wife.” - Marjorie Taylor Greene (Levin, 2022)

Conservative politics emphasizes traditional gender roles, justifying them by what is “natural”. In a grander scheme this minimizes not only women but the validity of people belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. The far right excludes members of these groups through religious and

pseudo-scientific discourse (Seidell, 1988). Religion serves as a normative framework, a model to reference when determining the respectable dispositions and capacities of a woman (Wilde, 2018). There are “non-institutional mechanisms that secure rule” (Wilde, 2018, p.100). Many members of the far right submit to Christian theology, consequently this becomes the basis for exclusion. Ideas regarding sex, sexuality, gender, gender roles and equality are in many cases based in theology. This theology is proliferated as common sense, natural, good. Demonization of feminism and feminists has been spearheaded by religious fundamentalists within the far right (Hooks, 2000). Seidell posits that ideology surrounding sexuality is at the same time private, as in unfit for public discussion, and also public in its relation to the sacred. Sex and the sexes are dedicated to “superior goals” and in turn a part of a wider “national interest” (Seidell, 1988, p.155-6). The ‘national interest’ in question is the continuation of the evangelical, heteronormative, patriarchal tradition- in many cases working in concert with white nationalism. The state, and policies of the state, have a wide effect on social power relations. When movements and identities are deemed threatening, unnatural, evil, etc., by people in positions of power and trust (like state officials and television personalities and religious organizations), these harmful ideologies are mirrored by the public. This is exemplary through federal and state policies outlining what women (cisgendered and transgendered) are allowed to do in regards to reproductive health and other fundamental healthcare, often justified through religious ideology.

The guise of nature in a religious conception also affects marriage rights. Same sex marriage was legalized in the United States fairly recently in 2015. As of November 2022, the Senate codified same sex and interracial marriage into federal law with a 61-36 vote (Bustillo & Sei, 2022). All 36

no votes came from senators on the right. A majority of opposition is linked to Christian faith. At the core of homophobic and anti-LGBTQ+ discourse is inequalities between men and women. When individuals assigned male at birth exhibit characteristics thought to be stereotypical of women, they can be subjected to bullying, harassment, and violence. These characteristics usually include being sensitive, weak, and gentle in contrast to the typically masculine characteristics including unemotional, strong, and assertive. Feminine presenting people are targeted for not fitting the socially accepted gender norms. For this reason, one may deduct that because women are not seen as equals, men and male assigned at birth individuals that have features of femininity are also not seen as equals. The submission of women and femininity in the familial private sphere and public sphere including religion constitutes the same submission at an institutional level (Wilde, 2018). This inequality between men and women brings about violence and discrimination to all that do not fit the gender norm. Antifeminism does not only affect women. As the private sphere, the family, are central to political organization of gender relations, the state and its laborers promote Christian-heteronormative family structures to continue institutional patriarchal tradition and reinforce societal gender inequality (Wilde, 2018). When gender inequality is validated by religious fundamentalism it can be difficult to change the discourse and ideology as those submitting to it are steadfast in belief and position opposing ideology as sacrilege. Hooks states the societal emphasis on patriarchal religions like Christianity reveals the metaphysical dualism (the assumption that world can be always understood through categorical binaries, good and bad) that makes up the “ideological foundation of all forms of group oppression” including sexism and racism (2000, p.106). As a result of Christian dominance in American society male domination and sexism inform socializations based on gender and roles in society based on gender (Hooks,

2000). For this reason feminist transformation in cultural and political realms cannot be actualized without the transformation of religious belief and domination. This is not to say feminism is anti-religion. Feminism is concerned greatly with spirituality and has efforts to transform patriarchal religious thought so women can connect to the sacred without submitting to male domination (Hooks, 2000). Hooks (2000) posits that for women's liberation there must be an ongoing critique of institutionalized and organized religion and the promotion of alternative paths to spirituality.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

The dialectical-relational approach to critical discourse analysis is concerned with spotting social wrongs and understanding how and why they operate. Textual analysis and understanding of language work in unison with theoretical and social commentary to provide a reasoned account of the chosen discourses. Understanding why certain discourses are pervasive over others is pertinent in dismantling the master narratives surrounding womanhood and gender equality. Language is beyond the sentence, it is used to construct the speaker's identity (Gee, 2011) and the identities of the target audience. In this way dominant discourse reinforces harmful state policy, and harmful state policy reinforces systemic inequality and justifications for domination. Fairclough discusses that "power in discourse is concerned with discourse as a place where relations of power are actually exercised and enacted" (1989, p. 43). For this reason it is discourse that holds power in the arrangement of social orders of institutions and societies. These relations of power inform social struggles for power. Forms of domination and power establish unequal cultural and economic relations within a society and can be expressed through the actions and discourse of the citizen (Wilde, 2018).

Discourse has the power to influence thought, and in conjunction with societal forces has causal power. Discourse is not separate from ideology and the prevalence of harmful discourse has material implications on the groups they target. When someone has the power to shape popular opinion on matters of right and wrong, who is valid or invalid, what is righteous or evil, they have the power to shape how certain people experience the world. The American state and society has become consistently pulled more and more to the political right, as a result there is a growing culture of openly antifeminist belief. These beliefs are legitimized through discourse spread by trusted members of society like elected officials and media personalities. Women who actively spread antifeminist discourses are successful as they are seen as experts in a way; they are members of the larger group that they target and therefore their information and opinions are to be trusted. Therefore, the success of antifeminist propaganda may not reach the same success if it were mainly proliferated from men. For this reason the far right utilizes the image of the traditional American woman to spread misinformation in order to convince the general populace that feminism is *démodé*, or even detrimental to society. In this way, women are helping legitimize the broader movement of conservatism. This is not to say men within the far right are not perpetuating the same antifeminist discourses, they very much are, but this points to the far right's need to convince the rising generations of young women (the largest group most likely to support and identify with the feminist movement) (Barroso, 2021) of feminism's detriment. It is necessary to understand the societal implications of discourses of antifeminism whether they be rooted in masculinism, religion, or nationalism as they work in conformity with patriarchal societal and institutional practice to uphold the state of affairs that benefit those from which the discourse comes. Women within the far right participate in antifeminism to solidify their role and status

within a larger system of political dominance. For this reason defending traditional conceptions of American family, American womanhood and gender roles and Christian theology through patriarchal, nationalistic, pseudo-scientific rhetoric is essential. Therefore gender and gender relations are “principles of social organization and governing” (Wilde, 2018, p.103). Utilizing identity politics, gendered socializations and relations are justified as natural domination (Wilde, 2018).

In a feminist post-structural analysis civil society, public sphere, a politicized private sphere, and citizenship as discursive practice are all realms which uphold societal gender relations (Wilde, 2018). Through these realms one can analyze the way in which the political extends past the state and its institutions to construct social relations. Feminist research should bear in mind intersectional privileges and oppression (systemically and individually) (Sotirin, 2020). In this way society can work toward the denaturalization of harmful practices. The proliferation of antifeminist discourse affects women throughout all intersections of identity. Under patriarchal society, male domination and female subjugation have uneven ramifications for people in different minority groups. Antifeminism goes beyond just affecting women though, it harms other marginalized identities, specifically transgendered people and intersex people as mentioned previously. Burgeoning antifeminist discourse has very real societal implications in regards to what that discourse targets. This is exemplary when women’s health centers close because of antiabortion rhetoric, when transgender women are subject to violence because of anti-transgender rhetoric, when women are discriminated against in the work place because of prolific stereotypical gender normatives, etc. Social othering, idolatry of state leaders, and the normalization of certain

discourses work in concert to demonize divergence and promote an unerring ideology of far right political policy and social practice (Wilde, 2018). The work of feminism is not over, as stated by women within the far right political agenda. Through examining the intersections of feminism including race, class, and sex, one can identify gaps in societal progress that have very real consequences for both men and women. Feminism will not be nugatory until systems of patriarchal violence and systemic discrimination are rendered inoperable for all women and people irregardless of class, race, or gender identity. Though the United States is ahead of others in terms of gender equality this does not mean that the conditions are satisfactory or equitable. For this reason antifeminist discourse has no place in mainstream political thought and should be criticized.

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